CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION
In the proposed work, I intend to make an effort to interpret the literary writings of Jean Paul Sartre in the context of his philosophical works. First, I shall try to understand his own views with regard to what is literature. The detailed considerations which he examines in this connection lead us on to the formulation of the anthropological basis of literature—that is, the man-centredness of literary and philosophical reflections.

The language and the imagery which Sartre uses in his novels and plays throw light on the subtle ontological and political views embedded in his philosophical thought. Philosophically, the task undertaken by Sartre is to make the best possible use of "freedom" and to save men from the contingency, dogmatism and the bondage of tradition. He asserted in this context that our intention is to contribute to bringing about certain changes in the society in which we live. This can be achieved by changing both men's social condition and the conception which he has of himself.

The political task of the writer, however, is something which Sartre deduced from a philosophical theory of the nature of literature. Politically, therefore, the writer fulfills a particular function in
society. Rejecting the doctrine of art for art's sake, Sartre wrote about Flaubert and Goncourt as responsible for the massacres which followed the commune of 1871, because they did not write a single line to prevent them.

The final aim of art, says Sartre, is to reclaim this world by revealing it as it is, but as if it had its source in human liberty. In other words, the aim of literature is to do what Boquetin wanted to after listening to "Some of These Days" - that is to overcome the contingency of the world by presenting it as if willed to exist by men. The subtle use which Sartre makes of the word 'liberty' in establishing a link between his literary and political theories has been analysed by Iris Murdoch.¹

However, literature can fulfil its philosophical role if the writer and the reader are intellectually free, authentic human beings committed to the social and moral principles, which generate and inspire confidence in ontological and universal values of freedom and equality. The work of art is basically meant for generating inspiration. If it describes noble virtues and actions, it is intended that readers may imitate them. If it is a description of
inauthenticity, falsehood, pretence and bad faith, then it is desired that such a state of existence should be suppressed. We have a very famous quotation of Sartre in this context where he says, "Although literature is one thing and morality another, there is a moral imperative at the basis of each aesthetic one."  

According to Sartre, it is impossible to write a good novel in defence of anti-Semitism, because the very idea of writing a book against liberty and in praise of hatred, contradicts the basic definition of literature. The writer is a free man, addressing other free men and has only one subject: liberty...

That its function is to express the concrete universal to the concrete universal and that its end is to appeal to the freedom of men so that they may realise and maintain the reign of human freedom (Italics mine)

The writer takes the world as it is, with all its randomness. He confronts sweets and smells and all its humble details to present it to other libertines on the basis of one individual liberty. If the modern writer rejecting the false notion of literature, which prevailed in the past, manages to do this, then literature will be able at last to be what it really ought to be. Sartre calls it the subjective self-
consciousness of a society in permanent revolution.

Sartre believes that there is a public which can be enlightened by revealing their liberty and in this context, the function of the writer is to restore words to their proper meaning and to call a spade a spade.

This position brings Sartre very close to philosophers Ludwig Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin who maintain that the clarification of the meanings of words can bring them back from metaphorical meanings to everyday usage. In other words, they maintain that functions and structures of our language must be understood before making any further elaborations. As such an account Wittgenstein wrote: "We imagine that we have to describe entire societies."⁴

It is like bringing to light something which has been hidden hitherto. It is like a picture that lies within which we see when we look into things; something that lies beneath the surface and which an analysis digs out. Similarly, we make an effort to analyze an intentional act. However, scrutiny of an intention, of a particular feeling or of an inner
experience is an extremely difficult and elusive task. It is like trying to discern something of a kind which is as difficult to see as air or translucent water in a stream. It is the same difficulty which arises in our investigation of consciousness in its multi-fold manifestations, because even consciousness seems transparent and we tend to just look through it.

An inner experience of 'intending' also seems to vanish in a similar manner. One only remembers thoughts, feelings, movements in their connections with earlier situations. Wittgenstein describes this position as a dead end in philosophy where the task consists in describing phenomena which are hard to get hold of. We are beset by what it is to be 'hidden'. Wittgenstein says: "Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence." 5

In this context Wittgenstein says further:

If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (even as this may sound) in judgments. 6 (Italics mine)

Another philosopher J.L. Austin feels that language as such and in its primitive stages, is not precise, and that it is also not, in
Our sense, explicit: precision in language makes it clearer what is being said - its meaning: explicitness, in our sense, makes clearer the force of the utterances, or how (in one sense) it is to be be taken.\(^7\)

(italics in original)

and again he says:

All utterances must have first begun as imperatives (as some argue) or as swear words - and it seems much more likely that the 'pure' statement is a goal, an ideal, towards which the gradual development of science has given the impetus, as it has likewise also towards the goal of precision.\(^8\)

(italics mine)

In order to bring about distinctions in the light of this theory for different kinds of linguistic structures at the verbal or the written level, Austin speaks of happiness/unhappiness dimension as illocutionary; truth and false-hood dimension as locutionary meaning.\(^9\)

Wittgenstein had sought to do away with all explanations, for, he maintained that description alone must take its place. However, a description gets its purpose from the philosophical perspective which itself may have to be identified. This position brings us very close to how we would define literature, as literature is nothing but a narration or description of the totality of human experiences;
either these experiences are being described as intentional states of consciousness or as events occurring in relation and in response to human projects and actions.

Literature in this sense gives extensive view of the canvas of human lives with their wide-ranging and diverse multiplicities of characters, attitudes and dispositions. A writer only assembles a multitude of his reminiscences of whatever he has felt, known and experienced along with his imaginatively creative elaborations of possibilities, in respect of these experiences.

Sometimes a writer has an explicit purpose of subjecting all human practices and values to a critical investigation and thus of bringing about an enhanced image of what human life ought to have by way of its meaning.

A writer here can be compared to a philosopher in the Wittgensteinian sense of the term in so far as each is required to select, arrange, assemble the images to complete the picture of a landscape. This process involves finding, inventing and arranging
views and perceptions. Therefore, instead of merely concentrating on a 'gaze', the writer is required to make a wide survey in order to facilitate possibility of creating a work of literary excellence. As such, no method is required either for philosophy or for literature which may explain the origin and genesis of the work of aesthetic excellence or a position of philosophical perspective. Wittgenstein, for this reason, presented no method for philosophy. For there can be no method for inventing, arranging and assembling all that has gone by and through consciousness by way of structures of experiences.

In the world of philosophy or in literature, the only criteria for choosing this rather than that thematic structure is something which is most striking, most powerful and most captivating.

Another perspective from which I seek to introduce the present work is from the standpoint of the significance of philosophical concepts which illuminate the structural dimensions of literature i.e., whatever is being narrated, described or judged. It seems to me that the philosophical concepts provide a unifying
basis for the understanding of thematic structures in novels, plays, and other works of fiction. The significance of philosophical concepts and categories bears the same relationship to literary works as the categories of understanding bore to the possibility of knowledge in general in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

Kant has spoken of these categories as 'principles of unification' which alone make it possible for the diverse manifold of sense experiences to get synthesised and united into what he calls 'unity of apperception'. Unless this 'unity of apperception' is realised, no act of perception or judgement with respect to any experience felt or known by human beings, can ever be complete.¹⁰

Similarly, in the world of literature it is not possible to unify a play or a novel or a story unless it is riveted around a philosophical concept, idea or a feeling. The locus is provided, therefore, for weaving the literary imagination of the writer by these concepts, ideas or feelings, which facilitate the process of 'schematisation' in so far as human
experiences are concerned.

Another contemporary philosopher, R.P. Strawson, seems to hold a similar position in his philosophy of descriptive metaphysics when he says that behind and beyond all human experiences there are some residual categories which perform the function of being metaphysical principles for explaining human experiences. These categories he says are ultimate and irreducible and yet all that we describe, narrate or imaginatively create must derive from and point to in their direction.11

The contemporary trends in philosophy also include the phenomenological perspectives. I find it necessary to speak of the method which has been suggested by phenomenologists like Husserl and Merleau-Ponty for explaining the world, objects, actions and intentions. It is suggested by them that the scope and limitations of our realm of knoweability are determined by how things appear to us in our consciousness. Literature seems to me to be no exception to this kind of possibility. In fact, if at all, literature is more accepted as an account of all that appears to and in human consciousness in the form of how and what the world is.
All our actions and intentions which usually constitute the focal point of analysis and description in literary novels, plays and stories are more intimately bound to a phenomenological analysis rather than to any other. It highlights the generic characteristics of all that is described and narrated in any literary form. This method is supposed to unify the diverse aspects involved in a situational context like the characters faced with a challenge or a goal to be pursued in a given situation along with the given motives and intentions as well as the intended or the actual consequences. The structural unity of all those aspects provides not only the unifying theme, but also a criteria for evaluation and judgement.¹²

In the context of virtues of literature Sartre says that the work of literature is not "a simple description of the present but a judgement of this present in the name of a future."¹³ Literature should enable the reader to realize his situation fully, to take up the call of the work, to respond and thus take responsibility. He should develop the capacity
to choose and - through his acts - to make history.

Sartre's works have been called a literature of desperate situations, because he considers the absolute of torture and death as the most effective experimental condition under which to demonstrate the ultimate prise de conscience. Sartre's philosophical position maintains that freedom - even where it is denied - cannot be obliterated.

If Sartre has insisted on the ontological dimension of art as a freedom which intends itself, he has also summoned it to political function. Its purposes are negation (of the given) and projection (of a future).

It is not sufficient to give to the writer the freedom to say everything; it is necessary for him to write for a public which also has the freedom to change everything... in one word: literature is by its nature, the subjectivity of a society in permanent revolution. In such a society literature would overcome the antinomy of word and act.14

Contrary to what Molière and Balzac did, Sartre tries to make metamorphosis credible by the use of situations which rock the character to his foundations. Yet it does not effect a radical change in the original
choice. For, Beeth's novels, for example, remain the
moral of being throughout his metamorphosis. The
radical change comes only with conversion, for the
character breaks with his original choice and
abandons the sterile pursuit of being. This possibility
of conversion elevates Sartre's moral philosophy to a
higher level.

However, it is possible that a play of situations
throws the character outside himself. He may not be
able to reveal himself, as he is not the object to be
gradually revealed. He has to interpret what he is
from what the other characters tell him he is. His
being is continually in question and he is continuously
choosing himself. He will be what the other characters
make him and what his reactions to this attempt will be.

Sartre seems to suggest that there can be 'no pure
play', either of character or of situations. In
"Being and Nothingness", the character has a certain past,
but Sartre tries not to present this past as an eternal
nature. The past is shown to be a choice - an original
choice implicitly made by the child. However, it is
not authentic as the child is unaware of responsibility
and remissness. It is just a choice 'to be' or 'not
to be'. It is a *metamorphosis* or an *ethical conversion* which is depicted in *Comedien et martyr*. It indicates Sartre's faith in man. By faith Sartre implies not belief but faith alone. While the poet Blake realizes his city symbolically for himself, Sartre stresses solidarity and thinks in relation to the social situation.

Sartre gives expression to a philosophy of ambiguity, ambivalence, conflict between freedom of one with that of another, and a dialectical relationship between aloneness and reciprocity. This he calls the theatre of *caractère*. The question of what we are has to be settled by reference to the others as well as ourselves. The term *caractère*, derived from French literary tradition means events and situations which bring out the characteristics of human life in the same way as we can highlight the characteristics of a statue by ingenious lighting.

Sartre therefore makes revelation, illumination or truth seeking as the main function of theatre as well as works of literature. He uses theatre as a means of purgation, as he has used *extreme situations* to produce brutal illumination (as in *Les Bouches and*
the concept of party). Through the conflict of freedom the characters in the novels and plays abandon the sterile pursuit of being and then turn to negations and projects which create possibilities for greater freedom.

Sartre here pleads for a literature of liberation through revolution. He seeks to dispel illusions through literature. Through revelations and illuminations Sartre points out the necessity of action-committed action, in pursuit of authentic values of freedom and classless society. He demands a critical attitude from his readers. The temporality of a novel or a play is satisfactory for him only when it is closest to real time. The authenticity of action is proved only when the action springs from a sense of obligation rather than an external imperative.  

In his numerous novels, plays and stories Sartre tries to present his perceptions of what human life is. He also depicts his own fascination and dread of death, his ambivalence which lies at the root of most of our deepest intentions; his projects and evasions. He has converted literature into a form of philosophical explanation of his faith in man and in reality as a supreme consideration for all that can be deemed as literature.
REFERENCES


3. Ibid., p.119.

   See also, Justin Leiber, "Linguistic analysis and Existentialism" Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, XXXII, 1 (September, 1971), p.35.

5. Ibid., (109), p.47.


8. Ibid., p.72.


14. Ibid.